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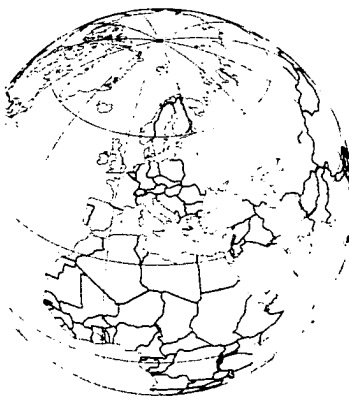
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EUR M84-10050



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**Office of European Analysis  
Directorate of Intelligence**

EUR M 84 10050

## Portugal: Political Culture and National Character

Portugal became a nation-state in 1140, when most of the countries of modern Europe had not yet been formed, but it has failed to keep pace with its neighbors in its political, economic, or social development. The country has remained backward largely because the governing elites until the revolution in 1974 chose not to address some fundamental problems: personalism, which encouraged political and ideological factionalism; divergent north-south patterns of land ownership; and the disparities between Lisbon and the less-developed countryside. From the early 16th century until the mid-1970s, Portugal's extensive African and Asian colonies served as a safety valve for unemployment pressures and provided a captive market and a guaranteed source of revenue. But they also allowed successive regimes — monarchies and dictatorships alike — to ignore domestic problems almost entirely. Now the colonies are gone, and Portugal is simply small and poor. With no remaining foreign diversions, Portugal's leaders have slowly begun to realize that they must now confront the historic inhibitors of development. [ ]

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### I. Personalism

A. Accepting the predominance of individual or personal interests and actions over collective or national interests has long been the norm in Portugal.

— Because the country was governed for the benefit of a small elite, the concept of the legitimacy of constitutional law or government did not take root. Most Portuguese still assume that those who make laws or govern do so to further their own interests rather than those of society as a whole. Protecting oneself and one's resources from the government is widely perceived as a natural and legitimate activity.

— Compounding the problem of personalism is the notion of Sebastianism, the term given to a popular yearning for the sudden appearance of a great man who will miraculously solve the country's problems. The idea dates back to the late 16th Century, when the Spanish Crown claimed the Portuguese throne after the heirless Portuguese King Sebastian fell in battle in Morocco. Popular belief held that Sebastian would return as a savior to liberate the people from all oppression. [ ]

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B. Today's leadership is struggling to win acceptance for the idea that the government must have the support and participation of the population if it is to modernize Portugal and restore it to international respectability.

— These efforts are made all the more difficult by the public's low level of political sophistication and a historic lack of sustained political mobilization.

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- The yearning of the population for a "man on a white horse" has given particular salience to the ambitions of President Eanes. The non-partisan Eanes cannot succeed himself as President, and press statements show that the leaders of the democratic parties fear that he will use his wide popular appeal to create a strong personalistic party that would undermine their efforts to create a modern pluralistic system (of course, they also fear that he will take votes away from them.)

## II. Political and Ideological Factionalism

### A. Personalism has encouraged the splintering of the political elite into small parties or groups that fight among themselves.

- Portugal's recent history, although not as violent as Spain's, has been a struggle between those holding differing views of how politics and government should be conducted — supporters of liberal, parliamentary government versus authoritarian rulers; clericalists versus anti-clericalists; republicans versus monarchists; parliamentarians versus presidentialists.
- The tendency toward factionalism has prevented the governing elites from reaching a consensus on fundamental issues, such as the degree of government involvement in the economy.
- Factionalism has also delayed the development of a modern party system: most of the parties lack disciplined cadres, clear goals, distinct ideologies, or meaningful programs.
- The weakness of the democratic parties in the early days of the Revolution allowed the Communists, with superior party discipline and organization, for a short time to play a leading role in deciding the political direction of the country.
- Finally, factionalism has contributed to the instability of the parties and to the failure of governing coalitions.

### B. Prime Minister Soares' experiences in office are illustrative of the practical effect of factionalism. He has formed three governments since 1976, the first two of which failed because of personal and party differences.

- At present, he sits atop a coalition that has a clearer program than most previous governments for confronting the country's problems — but it remains fragile because of the factional strains within the parties.
- Eanes, looking over the politicians' shoulders, heightens the tension.

## III. Land Ownership - North versus South

### A. The Tagus River — which flows through Lisbon — is a dividing line between North-South land ownership patterns.

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- In the north, geography, isolated markets, and an age-old system of subdivision by inheritance have produced an economic structure based on numerous small private businesses and a patchwork of family-run farms.
- By contrast, the south—an area of expansive and arid plains — has the nation's largest concentration of landless rural workers, who are employed in the inefficient exploitation of vast land tracts with origins in the Roman estates and the latifundia of earlier eras.

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B. The north is also the stronghold of Portuguese Catholicism, which has long buttressed a political conservatism marked by firm opposition to Marxism and a close identification with the traditional society and economic system. The Salazar-Caetano regime that preceded the Revolution, no less than the 19th Century monarchy, viewed this constituency as a key element of its power base.

- Despite anti-clerical initiatives mounted in the name of social and political reform — especially during the First Republic and at the outset of the Revolution — the church has retained its hold on the rural north, playing a central role in the conservative backlashes that followed in both cases.

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C. Before the Revolution, the social structure in the south was dominated by a rigidly hierarchical patron-client system of economically oppressive and autocratic local rule. The Church played little role in social development in the south, and secularization took hold.

- The peasants, confronting daily the uneven distribution of wealth, were attracted to the message of the Communist Party and served as a ready-made, militant following when the Revolution came.

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D. The fundamental differences in the social and political attitudes of the landholding small farmers in the north and those of the landless southern peasants have created to some extent "two Portugals."

- Implementing social and agrarian reforms to alleviate the country's severe food shortages and unemployment pressures is severely complicated by the conflicting pressures of these ownership patterns.

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#### IV. Lisbon versus the Provinces

A. The tension between relatively cosmopolitan Lisbon and the underdeveloped provinces stems primarily from the conflict between the centralizing tendency of the capital and the desire for decentralization prevalent in the provinces.

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- Since the program of centralization undertaken in the 18th century by the Marquis of Pombal to deal with recurring economic problems, a number of governments have attempted to give the regions greater autonomy in local administration and fiscal planning. Little has happened, however.
- The failures are largely a result of the scarcity of resources in a limited economy and the clashes over how to divide those resources.
- All the democratic parties today theoretically support decentralization as a means of strengthening democracy at the local level — and not just at election time. But to date they have been no more effective than their pre-revolutionary predecessors at turning talk into action. [ ]

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#### V. Reshaping the National Image

- A. The image of Portugal as a colonial power was an integral part of the national psyche. Former dictator Salazar promoted the notion in defining the country's uniqueness, and the average Portuguese citizen accepted it.
- The sudden attainment of independence by Portugal's African colonies deprived the metropolis of its status as a world power almost overnight. Adjusting to that change has proven difficult for the nation. [ ]
- B. To recover some prestige, Portugal is trying to regain a position in Africa, to secure a place in the European Community, and to strengthen its relations with NATO and the United States.
- Lacking the economic resources to aid Africa, Portugal must rely on third parties — such as the US — to underwrite its activities there.
  - Negotiations for EC membership have been long and arduous, and, ironically, Portugal's admission has become hostage to Spain's application.
  - Moreover, Spain's membership in NATO has caused Portugal to worry that its role in the Alliance will become even less important than it is now. [ ]

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